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Monday, July 16, 2007

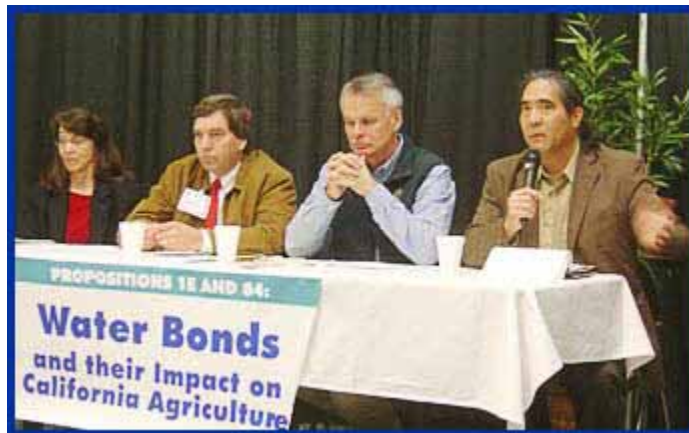
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A.G. on Ag**A.G. on Ag - California Agriculture Updates - February 2007**[▶ Archive 2006 Newsletters](#)**▶ MARK YOUR CALENDARS!**

CDFA is hosting **AG DAY '07** on Tuesday, March 20th, on the west steps of the State Capitol, from 11:30 AM to 2 PM. The theme this year is **"Powering Our Future."** A special guest will be Shaun White, gold medalist snowboarder and professional skateboarder. This popular event will feature speeches, cooking demonstrations, music and more!

Got Data? The **2006 CALIFORNIA AGRICULTURAL RESOURCE DIRECTORY** will be available in early March in both print and online versions. It includes California's 2006 agricultural statistics; a closer look at the department's Animal Health and Food Safety Services; and an agricultural industry phone directory.



On February 13, at the [World Ag Expo](#) in Tulare, I chaired a listening session on the [Governor's water bond proposals](#) with (L-R) Luana Kiger, Special Assistant to the State Conservationist with the [USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service](#); Jason Peltier, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Water and Science at the [U.S. Department of the Interior](#); and Mike Chrisman, Secretary for the California [Resources Agency](#).

The World Ag Expo is a great opportunity to bring together people and innovative farming ideas and equipment from around the world. While at the Expo, I was also pleased to speak at meetings of the [California Ag Irrigation Association](#), [American Society of Agricultural and Biological Engineers](#), and at the annual Ag Leadership Breakfast. I enjoyed meeting with the California State [FFA](#) Officers and listening to their thoughts on young students getting involved in agriculture and becoming an integral part of the agricultural vision for the state.



I saw firsthand the freeze damage to vegetable seedlings at several [Native Southeast Asian and African American small acreage farms](#) near Fresno. I also had a chance to speak with the media about the impact of the freeze on local farmers and workers. Thank you to Fresno Mayor Alan Autry, Nisei Farm League's Manuel Cunha, City Council Members Blong Xiong and Jerry Duncan, USDA's John Smythe, Supervisor Larson, County Ag Commissioners Jerry Prieto, Gary Kunkel and David Moore for organizing an informative meeting with the small acreage farmers. I heard from Toulou Thao and Will Scott and about 25 farmers about the truly devastating impact the freeze had on their crops.

The deep freeze that struck California and the Central Valley last month caused tremendous damage to agriculture – more than \$1.3 billion. Of that, at least \$800 million was damage to citrus crops. The damage has extended much further than just crops, though. Many ag workers are out of a job, and entire communities that depend on agricultural revenue streams are hurting right now. Governor Schwarzenegger is moving aggressively to provide relief to freeze victims by making available \$14.2 million in [Small Business Disaster Loans](#) to farmers and businesses. He quickly proclaimed a state of emergency for all 58 counties and issued additional disaster proclamations for a number of counties that suffered agricultural losses. These designations help trigger federal relief programs and emergency loans. And he has requested a presidential disaster declaration that, if granted, would bring even more relief programs to California. The Governor also opened “one-stop” centers in 18 counties to help freeze victims with a variety of needs, including shelter, employment and food.



I spoke at a press conference and heard concerns brought by Manuel Cunha, Jr., of the [Nisei Farmers League](#), Will Scott and Toolu Thao during a visit with local Southeast Asian and African-American farmers near Fresno.

My role has been to connect with farmers around the state and share information with them – to let them know that their government is working for them and that there could be relief opportunities ahead. I am also sharing information with the Governor and USDA Secretary Mike Johanns, with whom I met earlier this month in Modesto and Washington D.C. I have been able to visit freeze-damaged farms in many regions of the state and see first-hand what farmers are going through. They have suffered widespread damage. I have visited large farms and small to make sure farmers knew that relief opportunities could be extended to them. My visit earlier this month to Washington also gave me the opportunity to meet with members of Congress and educate them about freeze damage and the need for federal relief assistance.

I've also been participating in Congressional listening sessions on the [2007 Farm Bill](#). I look forward to hearing your comments.

A.G. Kawamura

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(Photos: J. Henderson, R. Tse)

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